

## **Conference Communique: MDIs: Developing Public Sector Capacity for Africa's 21<sup>st</sup> Century Needs**

The African Management Development Institutes' Network (AMDIN) a Pan African network of management development institutions (MDIs), including schools and institutes of public administration and management met from 29 – 31 August in Midrand, South Africa. Gathered were Heads of Institutions and senior officials from 17 African countries. They met as a network for the first Biennial Conference and General Assembly, deliberating on the theme "MDIs: Developing Public Sector Capacity for Africa's 21<sup>st</sup> Century Needs". The conference was attended and supported by some of the most notable development partners including the African Union Commission and representatives from its programme NEPAD, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the World Bank, the Commonwealth Secretariat, development agencies from the German and Japanese governments. The Federal MDI in Brazil and the Civil Service College of Singapore were in attendance, providing an international comparative dimension to the conference.

The conference reiterated the importance of African MDIs in assisting with developing appropriate public sector capacity to ensure rapidly pushing ahead Africa's developmental agenda. It reiterated the important principles of African ownership of the network and its programme of action; sharing of resources, including expertise and knowledge, among African MDIs; and a quest for continuous improvement and raising of performance standards in the interest of securing human development on the African continent.

In an opening address to the Conference, the Chairperson of the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Pan African Conferences of Ministers of Public/ Civil Service

and Minister of Public Service and Administration in South Africa, Geraldine Fraser Moleketi stressed the importance of MDIs as strategic capacity development agencies of public services across the continent and emphasised the responsibility they therefore carry to transform the mindsets of public servants. She went on to identify AMDIN as an important vehicle to assist in developing the necessary capacity within the MDIs to fulfil their important mandate, as they themselves are for a variety of reasons experiencing phenomenal challenges.

Conference reminded itself of the fact that MDIs have a responsibility to redefine their own relevance within their national, sub-regional and regional contexts, if they are to respond to the capacity deficits that exist and optimise their roles in the policy domain with respect to public administration. Conference noted that such a responsive relationship should be supported by governments nurturing their respective MDIs over a sustained period.

Mindful of the fact that capacity development is a multifaceted and long term agenda the conference recognised the interdependency between governments, comprising both political and administrative functions on the one side and their MDIs on the other. Equally, within the contemporary context there exist important interdependencies between the public sector, the private as well as community sectors. For the purpose of urgent capacity development in the public sector the synergies, but also unique roles of MDIs and the universities should be exploited.

Conference accepted the notion that success attracts and earns respect and recognition. This is critical if MDIs are once again to be recognised as key think tanks and roleplayers in fundamental change processes that take place in the public sector across the

continent. AMDIN has a critical role to play in addressing the deficiencies that exist in the African MDIs – on institutional, organisational and individual levels. With the assistance of AMDIN and within a networked and constructive collective spirit, African MDIs will set out to achieve a multifaceted and durable agenda to raise their own standards and set continent-wide benchmarks to guide a process of continuous improvement. In this respect the All Africa Public Service Charter should provide the backdrop against which the standards discussion would be handled. The conference noted as critical for the improvement of capacity of MDIs themselves the need for quality leadership and management.

The conference was particularly mindful of the need for an adequate and sustainable resource base, ensured by governments. The governments are in the final analysis the most important buyers and beneficiaries of high performing MDIs. Such a resource base would form a necessary part of a conducive policy environment for MDIs. However, such an environment would be much more encompassing, when it also includes the formulation of comprehensive Human Resource Development Strategies at national levels as well as the restoration of general trust, support and recognition by governments as full-partners in the development agenda. The conference observed that there is a need for governments to hold MDIs accountable for resource allocation in relation to their basic mandate.

The conference recognised that coordinating development partners around an agenda driven by AMDIN for developing the capacity of MDIs, is a critical success factor. The conference further agreed that MDIs are catalysts, individually and collectively, for much of the programmatic activity supported by the donor community. The Conference appealed to the development partners to sustain and

further enlarge their support to AMDIN, both in terms of finance, but also knowledge exchange and moral support.

Recognition was given to the fact that regional and international knowledge networks exist that can contribute greatly in MDIs gaining critical and fast-tracked capacity development to deal with the challenges MDIs face. Conference therefore urged governments to support the participation of their MDIs in such networks.

The conference was mindful of developments in information and communications technology (ICT). Such developments provide the necessary platform for improving on the scale and quality of the work of African MDIs. Using such technology is the way to ensure the required results in a short period of time as demanded by existing development goals.

The conference recognised that resources are but one important factor in changing the performance of MDIs. Equally, if not more important, is the issue of mindset and commitment. Conference requested MDIs to start paying attention to this important factor and address it within their own ranks as well as diffuse a new mindset into our African public sectors at large.

AMDIN used the conference to report on progress made with establishing the network over the past two years. It also elected its second Council for the period 2007 – 2009, comprising of 12 regional representatives. Professor Sheikh Abdullah, Director General of the Administrative Staff College of Nigeria (ASCON) was elected as Chairperson of the network for the next term.

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